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SUBJECT: EVALUATION OF DIGITAL VIDEO CONFERENCE:
"IRAQI ELECTIONS: NEXT STEPS" February 9, 2005 (3:00 -
4:00 P.M. EST) TRACKER 23452

1 DESCRIPTION: Dr Kenneth Katzman, Specialist in Middle East Affairs, U.S. Congressional Research Service gave a one-hour, one-country (Embassy and six constituent posts) DVC on the subject of the recently held Iraqi elections.

2 DATE: Fiscal Year, and Quarter: Wednesday, February 9, FY 2005; Second Quarter.

3. JUSTIFICATION/OBJECTIVE: Post would like to address the significance of the elections, as the centerpiece of the interim Iraqi government and the provisional coalition's plan to establish a democratic system of government in Iraq. The fundamental question we would want to examine is whether the results will help to achieve that goal and to bring about an end to sectarian violence. Sub-topics would include voter turnout, particularly among Sunnis, and what effect it will have on minority representation in the new government. In addition, we would like to look at the Kurdish desire for relative autonomy in the new federation. We would be interested in an analysis of Syrian, Turkish, and Iranian reactions to the elections and implications for regional stability.

5. MPP THEME: International Public Opinion; Regional Security

7. AUDIENCE: The DVC was well attended at all Posts and attracted over 50 attendees country-wide. The make-up of the audiences was broader than usual. In attendance were the Press Secretary of the newly established Iraqi Embassy in Canada; Muslim and Canadian journalists; Iraqi-Canadian and Kurdish representatives; Middle East experts from various Canadian Universities as well as officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Canadian International Development Agency; Privy Council Office; prominent think tanks; and several university students. The audiences were amazed at Dr. Katzman's in-depth knowledge of the region and appreciated his substantive grasp of an extremely complex and rapidly evolving subject as well as his willingness to engage in discussion with people of opposing views. His thought-provoking analysis generated lengthy post-DVC discussion at most Posts.

Many in our audience were initially surprised that the Embassy would present a speaker whose views diverge on many points from official USG policy, and they came up afterwards to compliment us for doing so. We feel that showcasing the controversial views of a respected academic researcher enhanced the Embassy's credibility in the eyes of our GoC counterparts and perhaps made them realize that the U.S. Government draws upon a wealth of resources in the formulation of policy toward Iraq. Dr. Katzman's final comment that the program had given him issues to think about that he had not considered was an extra plus for the organizers. Moreover, the passionate commentary that came forth during the question and answer period highlighted the difficulty of the task confronting Iraq as it seeks to create a pluralistic democracy that protects minority rights. Dr. Katzman's plea for the Shia to adopt an enlightened and conciliatory approach to the Sunnis received a sympathetic response from many in our audience, and even those who disagreed still appreciated his analysis. Some of the Posts were able to make new contacts both in academia and in various Mid-eastern ethnic communities.

5. QUALITY OF U.S. SUPPORT: Excellent. Brenda Butler is to be complimented on filling the moderator's role very competently, a task that is crucial to the smooth running of the program.

6. TECHNICAL EVALUATION: Excellent. Post expresses

its appreciation to IIP for its assistance in the realization of this program.

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